

Contributions

SERMON ON FORGIVENESS

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Text: "So likewise shall my heavenly Father do also unto you if ye from your hearts forgive not every one his brother their trespasses."—Matt. 13:35.

During or previous to Bible times a certain king held a reckoning with his agents. One of them fell into the king's debt to the amount of about \$9,375,000. He must have been dealing in "stocks" pretty heavily. As he had nothing wherewith to pay this enormous debt the servant and his wife and children were ordered to be sold and the proceeds to be applied toward liquidating the debt. This severe sentence brought the man to his feelings and he began to implore for mercy. He fell at the feet of his master and begged for time and he promised he would pay all. And his importunity actually touched the heart of the king. He was not only granted time, but the debt was forgiven him. Think of it: over nine millions of dollars to be forgiven. This is a marvelous story but it is founded upon Bible statements. However, we must not forget that it was a king who forgave. Perhaps a hundred dollars would be as much to me, or some of you.

Then this same man went out to settle with his customers. One owed him a small amount, whom he took by the throat and demanded immediate payment. Not having the money with him, he too begged for mercy and time, and promised to pay all. But he was relentless and forthwith had him thrust into prison. Other subjects of the king were moved by this cruel treatment and reported the matter to the master, who became very indignant, had the offender recalled, lectured him severely for his uncharitable conduct, and gave him over to the tormentors until he should pay all that he had owed the king.

Now, beloved, in the same way Jesus Christ says his heavenly Father will treat us, if from the heart we do not every one of us forgive our brother his trespasses. This is a momentous declaration. And it is not an outburst of feeling—if such a thing were possible with our Savior—but a deliberate statement, emphasized by an unmistakable illustration. Nor is it an isolated statement, for it has a number of proof texts, to wit: "When ye stand praying, forgive, if ye have ought against any; that your Father also, which is in heaven, may forgive you your trespasses. But if ye do not forgive neither will your Father which is in heaven forgive your trespasses." Matt. 11:25, 26. "Judge not, and ye shall not be judged; condemn not, and ye shall not be condemned: forgive and ye shall be forgiven." Luke 6:37. "And he shall have judg-

ment without mercy, that hath shown no mercy: and mercy rejoiceth against judgment." James 2:13.

Here is a bill of indictment against such as study revenge. They would have God forgive them, but they will not forgive others. They will pray, attend church, give alms, but, as Christ has said, one thing they lack: a forgiving spirit. Let us all be persuaded then, as ever we hope for salvation, to pass by petty injuries, and to cultivate a forgiving spirit.

1. Herein we resemble God. The king in the parable represents God. The kingdom of heaven is like it, therefore the King of heaven will deal with his subjects as this king did with his servants. We are to strive to attain godlikeness, godliness. "That ye may be the children of your Father which is in heaven; for he maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and the unjust." Matt. 5:45.

2. To forgive is one of the highest evidences of grace. It is an assurance that we have been born of God. "To err is human, to forgive divine."

3. Consider the blessed example of our Lord and Master. Though he was reviled he reviled not again. He pitied his enemies, and asked that their sins might be forgiven, though the words they spoke against him were more bitter than the gall they gave him to drink. Let us learn of him what may be forgiven.

4. The danger of an unforgiving spirit. (1) It hinders our prayers. How can we pray the Lord's prayer: "Forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors," while we harbor enmity in our hearts. (2) It hinders communion. Some churches have deferred communion services for years because of some feud among some of the members which could neither be adjusted nor forgiven. There was not love enough in the church to hold a feast. (3) It poisons the members. They "Eat and drink damnation to themselves." (4) It destroys activity and causes death. "For this cause many are weak and sickly among you and many sleep." Vindictiveness, in the heart of the professed Christian, is like a powerful narcotic.

5. God has linked his mercy to this condition: "If we forgive, he will forgive us; if we do not forgive our fellow men, neither will he forgive us. A person will be lost for not forgiving just as he will be for not believing. It disqualifies him for heaven. Heaven is as God is. God is love. To inherit heaven we must become like him. "He that has this hope (of heaven) in him will purify himself even as he is pure."

6. Notice this spirit of forgiveness in the good men of the Bible, (1) Joseph forgave his brethren. What a terrible

injury they had done him. Cast him into a pit, then lifted him out and sold him to strangers. Despite all their injury he rose to prominence and affluence while they became impoverished. They were at his mercy, but he treated them as kindly as though they had never betrayed him. (2) Stephen, while being cruelly stoned, prayed that his tormentors might be forgiven, as they did not know what they were doing. (3) Moses had the same forbearing disposition. How many injuries and affronts he bore patiently. The waters though bitter, were yet not as bitter as were the spirits of his people by times.

7. The example of other good men. (1) When Luther reviled Calvin, Calvin said: "Though he call me a devil a thousand times, yet I will love and honor him as a precious servant of Christ." (2) When a certain person had abused and wronged a Christian, as a last resort he twitted him by asking what wonders his Master had worked, was answered: "He has wrought this wonder: that thou have so injured me, yet I can forgive you and pray for you."

8. It is the best way to conquer, win and save an enemy. Saul having pursued David with malice, and hunted him like a partridge upon the mountains, yet David would not do him mischief when it was in his power. David's kindness melted Saul's heart. "Is this thy voice, my son David? And Saul lifted up his voice and wept, and said: Thou art more righteous than I, for thou hast rewarded me good."

It is related of Philip of Macedon, that when it was told him that Nicanor had openly railed against him, instead of putting him to death, sent him a rich present which so overcame the man that he went about and recanted what he had said against the king. In fact this is the Christian's system of revenge upon his enemies, and the only one which his creed will allow him to use. "Therefore if thine enemy hunger, feed him; if he thirst, give him drink; for in so doing thou shalt heap coals of fire on his head." Rom. 12:20. He cannot bear up long under such punishment.

9. Forgiving others assures to us the forgiveness of God. "If ye forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you." Matt. 6:14.

Then, dear brethren and sisters, let us forgive all men all the injuries they may have done unto us, and thus have a good conscience toward God and toward all our fellow men. This will afford us that "Blessed Assurance" we sing so much about.

But how must we forgive? Answer, as God forgives. As we desire to be forgiven. (1) Cordially. Willingly, happy with the opportunity of reconciliation and of exhibiting the spirit of your Master. The Lord loves a cheer-